

John Bender Loves Steve Harrington by flippyspoon

Series: [Billy Hargrove Sucks \[2\]](#)

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Summary:

In which Billy is trying. No, really.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Back by popular demand? As if I wouldn't have anyway.

Billy was in Study Hall, devotedly failing to study, when he saw Steve playing with the necklace. He was sitting next to Steve, but not too close, because they were both pretty paranoid. But he wasn't paranoid enough not to be staring at Steve's arms. Steve was wearing a dumb yellow Polo shirt and the cuff cut him right in the middle of his upper arms. Harrington had some muscle but he was still a little soft and something about that had always been weirdly appealing to Billy. He was sitting there thinking how much he wanted to bite into the curve of Steve's bicep when Steve, eyes trained on his Economics book, absently took the necklace out from under his collar and started fidgeting with it. He looked so casual, leaning on his elbow. Billy didn't think about it much, until Steve's eyes slid over to his and then the silver chain, entwined around his fingers, met his lips and then the tip of his tongue. It was a goddamn turn-on. He winked at Billy.

Billy smirked, mouthed, "Fuck you."

Steve's eyebrows quirked as if to say, "Promise?"

Billy shook his head and imagined all the ways he would make Steve Harrington pay for that once they were alone in the BMW (there was something satisfying about defiling that particular status symbol).

Billy opened his notebook and uncapped a Bic and scribbled a giant ejaculating dick and an arrow pointing at it and the words: THIS IS GOING DOWN YOUR THROAT.

Steve raised an eyebrow and leaned over to draw a giant hand and an arrow pointing to it and the words: THIS IS GOING UP YOUR ASS.

Billy snorted a laugh. They had not done anything close to that, not that Billy didn't want to. Only he'd been so happy with handies and

BJ's from the first guy at Hawkins High who he'd looked at and thought, *That one*.

Not that he hadn't thought about it. *Excessively*.

Billy drew a barely recognizable tongue. THIS IS GOING UP MY ASS.

Steve turned *red* and, smiling, shook his head.

Billy heard a cough behind him and shut his notebook with a start. *Paranoid*.

Billy didn't quite remember the fight. When he thought of it, it was in flashes; the hard smack of bone on bone, Steve's stunned and battered face, the sound of a plate shattering. What he remembered viscerally was waking up in the Byers' house, disoriented, and for several moments having no idea how he'd arrived there. The place had looked like a lunatic's asylum; scribbled crayon drawings taped up all over the place. He remembered sitting up, everything aching, and looking down at his bloodied knuckles. His hands had been shaking. That didn't stop for a long time and he couldn't figure out why. He'd been in plenty of fights. He remembered the Byers' fridge falling open and a giant tarp covered lump falling out. Confused and nauseous, he'd run outside, not bothering to see what it was. In the fresh, crisp cold air of November, everything had come rushing back. He'd demolished Steve. He'd *wanted* to demolish Steve, he'd wanted to hurt him and hurt everyone so everyone could feel like he did. That never made him happy, but there had always been a kind of satisfaction to it.

He remembered Max standing over him with the bat. For a moment he'd been scared of *her*. Later some part of him had thought: *She's tougher than me*.

He couldn't image standing up to his dad the way she'd stood up to him.

After that everything felt...off. He couldn't find that buzz again from

fucking with people, from fucking with Max and attempting to keep her in line the way his father kept him in line. The buzz was the only thing keeping him together. It was nothing he could have put into words. If he'd tried, he might have said: People fuck with you, so you fuck with somebody else, you bang, you drink, you die. People who didn't get that, he might have said, were weak idiots.

When the buzz went away he had to find some other place to get it. Which turned out to mainly be vodka. He didn't know his liquors. He had traditionally been a beer man. The guy at the liquor store outside of town hadn't even carded him the first time. It had helped, it was numbing. And that was how he had ended up stumbling into Steve Harrington one afternoon.

At school he had mostly ignored Steve after the fight or pretended it had never happened at all. He wasn't sure he would ever have summed up the nerve to actually apologize if he hadn't still been a little drunk. Maybe.

They didn't talk about it that much, not since *The Breakfast Club*. They talked about other things, things Billy wouldn't have thought he'd ever talk about to anyone. He told Steve about Chris, the kid he'd been caught with. Chris had been slight and pale and always picked last for dodgeball. Billy had already been a dick but they'd somehow figured each other out and Billy had invited him over to "study." Billy had always been athletic but at fourteen he was really starting to get some muscles. He'd felt strong and big. Not big enough. That time his father had lifted him right off the ground and slammed him against the wall. He remembered the way the door had rattled and rapid irregular footsteps as Chris made his escape. He told Steve that and Steve said something well-meaning and nice, except that nice so often sounded like bullshit. And anyway, then Steve had kissed him and whispered that it was alright, it would be alright, everything was alright.

He told Steve about the first time his father had smacked him. His nose had bled. He remembered the surprise of it, some epiphany that kids probably shouldn't have.

Oh.

That's all it had been for such a long time. A smack now and then, sometimes with no warning so that you were always on your guard just in case you had done *something* and couldn't remember.

But he didn't tell Steve about waking up at the house or his shaking hands. Couldn't bear to. He didn't tell Steve about having to go home, not having found Max, and what had followed. He didn't tell Steve about how he'd egged his father on that time, wanting to feel a hit, angry, so angry and not even knowing it was because he *liked* this boy and he'd hurt him and hurt him so badly, his hands shaking. The next morning he'd looked almost as bad as Steve. Max had seen and only scowled at him. She'd probably assumed it was all from the fight at the Byers. They would barely exchange a word for days after that, the beginning of an unspoken truce. She mainly ignored him and that was fine.

After *The Breakfast Club*, everything seemed fine.

"You taking Max home today?" Steve whispered.

"Nah, she's going with Sinclair."

"Quarry?"

"Hell yeah, quarry."

The quarry was their "spot." It was also a lot of other Hawkins High teens' spot, but they'd found an out of the way nook where the Camaro couldn't be easily seen, and if it was they could peel out into a side road.

Under the table, in the very back of study hall where nobody could see, Steve's hand rested between Billy's knees.

"This day's never going to be over," Steve muttered, his eyes still on his work.

Steve abruptly jerked and said, "The hell..." He picked a wadded up piece of paper on the floor that had been thrown at his head." Billy turned, scowling, to find the offender, but everyone looked studious and quiet.

"Chill," Steve said. "It's just a note." Steve unfurled the note and Billy read it over his shoulder.

"Did you hear about the girl's bathroom?" Steve read. He made a face. "What?"

Billy chewed on his lip. He was about to get in trouble with Steve. He was pretty sure.

It had seemed like a good idea at the time.

Really.

Really it had.

After Study Hall, Billy and Steve headed to Gym and Billy feigned innocence as to the mystery of the note.

"Ya know...I'm just going in and look real quick," Steve said, motioning to the girl's room on the east end of the school. "I'll just be late to Gym. I'll see you there."

"Ah...yeah. Sure." Billy spun on his heel and made his way.

Things were going to go badly. He'd fucked this up.

He was pretty sure.

Billy knew how to be romantic with women, even if he didn't sleep with them. He knew what they liked, exactly what to say to get them all fluttering. He knew how to talk his way out of anything if there was a woman around who liked men, any kind of man.

But he'd never had an actual boyfriend and never liked anybody this much. There was also that intense guilty feeling he got sometimes, looking down at his knuckles, his hands would start shaking...

He was protective of his own machismo, even as it was all cloaked in vanity.

Being schmoopy about a dude was pretty fucking difficult with his dad keeping an eye out for signs of him even thinking about it.

So Billy didn't really know how to be romantic.

Shit.

Billy went to Gym and changed into his shorts and Hawkins tee and did not play well, especially when he saw Harrington walk in, his eyes going straight to Billy, a look of disbelief on his face.

When the rest of the gym class saw Harrington they stopped playing and all started hooting and applauding until the coach had to shout them back into submission.

They couldn't talk about this now, not in front of everyone. Instead they played, dancing around each other, Steve chasing him down the court with accusatory looks until Billy looked away.

In the showers, they had a little space to talk. Billy usually had to fight down an erection showering anywhere near Steve after Gym but now he just sniffed and bowed his head under the hard spray of scalding hot water.

"It was you, wasn't it?" Steve said. "Why the hell... *Why...*?"

"Interesting that you assume it was me," Billy said.

"Was it?"

"Yeah."

"Why would you- why why why would you!" Steve sounded mildly hysterical.

"It's not like it's an insult," Billy pointed out. "It's a compliment, Harrington. I mean obviously."

In the girl's eastwing bathroom in thick black permanent marker up on the bright lime green tile, right under the wide squat window next to the very last stall, was drawn a truly massive erect penis, rather detailed, with little marks around it to indicate a kind of glow. An arrow pointed to the giant dick and in parenthesis read simply: (Harrington's)

"Why in the girl's room?" Steve shook his head, looking truly baffled.

"I couldn't put it in the boy's room," Billy said, as if it should all be very obvious. "Then people would *know*. Why would a guy draw another guy's dick unless he was a big fan of the dick?"

"You're trying to make it look like a girl drew it?" Steve said, brows knit together. "Billy...girls don't draw dicks on walls."

They shut off their showers and Billy went to grab a towel, feeling way too vulnerable having a sort of a fight with his boyfriend while naked, but at least everybody else had cleared out.

Billy half spoke into his towel. "I was trying to be mmmph." He pulled his jeans on and not being quite dry yet, they only got damp. He threw on a fresh t-shirt and his denim jacket, grabbed his books, and slammed his locker, giving it a kick.

"What?" Steve said. "You were trying to be what?"

"Nothing! Forget it!"

Billy started to storm out and Steve called out after him. "We still going to the quarry?"

"Yeah! Meet me there!"

After school, Billy had a cigarette in the parking lot, and he certainly didn't miss the parade of people passing Steve, handing out high fives. He also didn't miss the way Steve was smiling, despite himself. Billy had never met The Old Steve, not really. He'd only heard about him. King Steve, the golden boy. Then something had happened. Nancy, Billy supposed. New Steve might be irritated, but there was still some Old Steve left that thought the big dick thing was funny.

Their eyes met across the parking lot and Billy spread his hands as if it say, "What did I tell you?"

Steve rolled his eyes.

"Billy."

That was Max, having rolled in out of nowhere, hopping on and off her board. "Lucas's sister is sick. I need a ride."

Fuck.

Steve was still looking at him. Billy gave him a cutthroat motion and his face fell. Well, he could probably get away later. The universe did not seem to care about how much he wanted to suck Steve Harrington's dick on this particular day. The universe was a sadistic dumbass sometimes.

In the car, Billy was typically quiet with Max, as had been his routine since The Fight.

Her board sat in her lap. She tapped her fingers on it.

Billy just watched the road, his cig hanging out of his mouth and ashing on the floor of the Camaro.

"Did you have something else to do?" Max said warily.

"Nah."

At home Billy they found a note on the kitchen counter that said: *We will be home late. Billy make dinner for Max.*

It was his dad's handwriting.

Billy's jaw clenched and he wanted to punch something. Instead he dropped his books in his room and changed into a t-shirt. He shut his door and paced around, feeling caged. He turned on some music, lit another cigarette, felt the anger welling up inside him. There was nothing unusual about them going out and putting him in charge of Max (as if she were a little kid and not almost fourteen), but his father had introduced his torso to the corner of his dresser the other

night, shoving him into it because he'd done his own laundry incorrectly or something. Billy wasn't even sure of the details on that one. He avoided taking off his shirt for a few days. Steve had blessedly not picked up on it.

A year ago a school counselor, suspecting abuse, had pulled Billy into his office. Billy had copped to nothing, had barely said a word that wasn't just blankly insulting. But he did remember one thing the guy had said.

"You hate your father, you want to get back at him someday? End up nothing like him."

Billy sat on his bed, clenched his fists and fumed. It wouldn't do any good taking it out on Max now anyway. That buzz had gone. It would just make things worse.

Then it wasn't even about the note. He just kept imagining his dad coming at him, that night after the fight. The way Billy had wanted him to. Coming at him.

He sucked on his cigarette, squeezed his eyes shut.

"Here I go again on my own..." He mumbled along with the song, ignoring tears squeezing out. "Goin' down the only road I've ever known..." It was *stupid*. There was no reason to be this upset.

Crying like the faggot you are, his father would have said.

He did some homework to distract himself. By 5:30 he was feeling better.

He found Max in the kitchen, doing homework at the table and eating Fritos.

Billy went to the cupboards to forage.

"You don't have to make dinner," Max grumbled. "I can my own dinner."

"Can't just have Fritos," Billy said. He grabbed the bag off the table, hearing her yelp of protest. Not that he cared. But somehow his dad

would know. He figured if he took care of the small shit, they wouldn't figure out the big shit. Sometimes you *couldn't* take care of the small shit. You could only try.

He found Hamburger Helper and a package of ground beef in the fridge. He took a big pan out of the cupboard and dropped it on the stove with a clatter.

"You can't cook," Max declared, watching him.

"Used to cook all the time." He dribbled some oil in the pan and threw the meat into brown, breaking it into chunks with a spoon. "Sides. Hamburger Helper's for morons. Anybody can make this shit."

"When did you used to cook all the time?"

"Before your mom."

They were quiet for a while. Billy had a wild thought of inviting Steve over.

Max, feeling the conversation out said. "Why are you...different?"

"Because."

"Because why?"

"*Because*, Max!" Billy sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry I've... been an asshole."

"You're sorry," Max snarled. "So it's all just okay 'cause you're sorry?"

"I didn't say that!" He stomped his foot. Turn around to the stir the meat. "I'm making dinner because he kicks my ass if I don't do what he says. Don't pretend you don't know that."

"You're just trying to make me feel sorry for you, well I don't!"

"Fine! Don't!"

“Fine!”

The meat was starting to brown. Billy pulled a head of lettuce and a bottle of Ranch out of the fridge.

“So he was a huge asshole to you-”

“Is a huge asshole.”

“So you were a huge asshole to me.”

“Pretty much.”

“But you’re not anymore?”

Billy shrugged and pulled out a salad bowl. He stopped and took a deep breath and reached over and picked up the phone.

“I’m inviting someone over,” he muttered.

“Now?”

“Shush.”

“Ugh,” he heard Max mumbled. “It’s gonna be Tommy.”

All Max heard from her seat at the table was:

“Hey...um, this might sound weird but... you want to come over for dinner? No no, they’re not home. I’m making dinner for Max. Yeah. Nah, it’s fine. They won’t be home til late. Yeah, just don’t park in front. Okay. Cool.” He chuckled softly into the phone and hung up.

Billy went back to chopping lettuce.

“You have a girlfriend now?” Max said. Her voice suddenly sounded too loud.

Billy stopped chopping, the knife hovering over the lettuce. “No.”

“That’s what it sounded it like.”

“Well, it’s not. Jesus.”

Billy added the noodles and the sauce packet and some milk. He left the cooking to check on his hair and change his shirt, which took a stupid amount of time. He was *nervous*.

His father terrified him, nearly everybody else either sparked indifference or disdain or anger.

Max was the most complicated of all.

But Steve Harrington managed to make him nervous. And the craziest part was, he didn't mind it.

The Hamburger Helper was still simmering and he gave it a few listless stirs when there was a tentative knock at the door.

Billy didn't even say anything before Max jumped to her feet with a sigh. "Yeah yeah, I'll get it."

Billy turned, a wooden spoon in hand. "Uh..."

He heard Max say, "Steve! What're you doing here?"

Quiet muttering.

"Oh. O...kay."

Max traipsed back in, followed by Steve. She looked both confused and visibly relieved. "Steve...*Harrington* is here? I guess?"

Steve leaned in the doorway. He was carrying a box of Mallomars. He smiled a comically awkward toothy smile. "I brought Mallomars."

Billy nodded and pretended his heart wasn't suddenly thundering in his chest. "Cool. Thanks."

He tried not to look too long at Steve who'd changed into a goddamn preppy as hell *pink* Polo shirt, his hair freshly coiffed. Billy wanted to eat him alive.

Steve set the Mallomars on the table and Max dove for them. "Not before dinner," Billy said.

"You're not the boss of me, ya know."

“Max. C’mon.”

Steve was stifling a laugh and Billy shook his head at him. *Fuck you, buddy.*

“So you guys are friends now?” Max said. “Seriously.”

They both shrugged.

“My opinion of you is blown,” Max said to Steve.

“My opinion of myself is blown,” Steve said.

“You’re both dicks,” Billy cracked.

“So whatcha been up to, Max?”

Just like that, the tension was significantly eased. Billy’s shoulders came unhunched. They chatted casually for a few minutes and then Steve popped up, ostensibly to help out but because Max was focused on a comic book at the table, Steve bumped Billy’s hip and Billy looked up at Steve standing close and felt a little shy. Soon enough there was actual dinner on table; Hamburger Helper in a serving dish, a big bowl of salad (assuming lettuce and Ranch and nothing else was salad) and a pitcher of Kool-Aid.

“Mm! This is good.” Steve waved a fork full of Helper.

“It’s Hamburger Helper,” Max said.

“It’s really good Hamburger Helper,” Steve said, his mouth full. “Makes a great meal.”

“Very cute, Harrington,” Billy said wryly. “Very cute.” He pushed the bowl of salad towards Max. “Vegetables.”

“Yeah! I know what they are,” Max said.

Steve was laughing at him. “You can shut the hell up,” Billy said, pointing at Steve.

“What’d I do?”

“Yeah yeah yeah.”

“Is that your necklace?” Max was pointing at the glimmering line of silver visible around Steve’s neck.

Everything stopped.

Steve’s head was bowed over his plate but his eyes met Billy’s. Billy swallowed his food.

“No,” Billy said quietly.

“Yeah it is, you’ve been wearing that forever.”

“Max.”

“Are you...are you guys...?”

“You can’t tell anyone,” Billy said, fixing her with a stare like murder. “I’m serious. You. Can’t. Tell. *Anyone*.”

Max searched his eyes, he suspected for some kind of trick or malice and just said, “Okay. Yeah okay.”

“Not even Lucas,” Steve said. “Not Mike, not Dustin. Nobody.”

“I won’t.” She nodded. “I promise.”

Billy’s hand shook on the table and Steve reached over and patted it. “It’ll be okay.”

Max looked back and forth between them and said, “This is *weird*.”

After dinner Max holed up in her room with her allotted Mallomars and Steve followed Billy to his room. It was still early and besides that, Billy’s room had a view of the driveway and he could hear his dad’s car coming quick. If they returned early he could send Steve out the backdoor.

He’d thought of these things before. Just in case.

Billy leaned in the doorway smoking, watching Steve take in his room; his messy unmade bed, hi-fi and big wooden speakers, stacks

of cassettes, the little table cluttered with hairspray and cologne and an overflowing ashtray. Steve walked over to the closet and tapped the poster of the bikini model on the door, raising an eyebrow. Billy shrugged.

“So this is where the magic happens huh?” Steve said.

Billy thought of his father hitting me in the face and throwing him against the wall, how his bedroom had never felt quite like a sanctuary because it had never truly been safe.

“You want to call it that,” Billy muttered.

Steve seemed to get the idea and came over to kiss him softly. “I figured it out by the way,” Steve said. “The bathroom dick.”

“Did you now?” He took a drag.

“You were trying to be romantic?”

Billy went red and looked away but Steve came in close. He took Billy’s necklace out from under the collar of his Polo and showed it to Billy. “Don’t try,” Steve said.

Then they were on bed and it was all groping and rough sloppy kisses until Billy finally kicked him out at a quarter to ten because “late” had always been an ambiguous term and he was already playing with fire.

“Shit.”

He’d forgotten to do the dishes. He was still washing up when his dad and Susan came home. But that only spoke in his favor. Good obedient son doing the dishes. Nothing was out of order. His father only gave him a wary, suspicious look and that was all. No questions.

Even outside of Steve’s presence, Billy considered it an unusually good night.

The next morning when Billy drove Max to school, the climate was a few degrees warmer, though they didn't talk much. Billy was two blocks from home free when Max had to go opening her mouth again.

"You never said *why* you're different," she said.

Billy made a general noise of discontent. "Christ, what does it matter?"

"If I don't know why then it's like you could be an asshole again suddenly."

"I'm not a damn werewolf."

Max gave him a look like he might be a damn werewolf. Oh right, he thought. I'm her monster. Just as his father was his monster. Big shadowy monsters looming.

"Look, I fucked somebody up," Billy said, ever so casual. "'Cause I thought I wanted to. But I didn't. And that's all you're getting. It's none of your beeswax, so just drop it already."

"You mean Steve," Max said as they pulled up to school.

It wasn't as if he needed to answer.

"What happens if your dad finds out?" Max said.

Billy laughed. "He'd do what you're thinking he'd do. Understand?"

"Yeah," Max said simply. "I understand."

Billy wasn't entirely sure if Max understanding that worked in his favor or not. But he probably deserved that uncertainty.

The bathroom dick had been scrubbed off in the night but guys were still high-fiving Steve in the halls, which he seemed to take in stride. The girls were just irritated. The question of who had drawn the dick was a popular topic of conversation, since nobody thought Steve had anything to do with it. But then at lunch Davy Ellison got in a decent fistfight with Matt Jovinelli and everyone's attention shifted again.

At lunch, Tommy bugged Billy about hanging out, peppering him with questions about who he might have been boning lately and also *why* was he so friendly with fucking Steve Harrington nowadays?

Tommy, Billy had quickly gathered, was like a toady who didn't know he was a toady. He'd immediately sussed Billy out as the new king and clung to him, which had been fine for making Billy feel big, but Tommy was fuckin' annoying and more than half of hanging out with him was keeping up a mountain of lies about dating girls (she doesn't go here), boning girls (she was 30, from Chicago), and his sexual prowess with girls (be vague, so as not to sound like a virgin). Shit like that might have seemed unbelievable coming from a ninety-pound weakling, but when you looked like Billy, everybody bought it. This was not shit he had consciously mapped out, it just *was*. He was used to it. But it got tiring after awhile and besides, he had Steve now and Steve hated Tommy and who had time for anything but Steve anyway.

The next day at school, there was no fistfight, but Billy finally lost it on Tommy. It was bad enough that he couldn't sit with Steve at lunch. Steve still sat with Byers and Wheeler and if Billy sat with them it would raise way too many questions.

Tommy was goading him, talking trash about Steve because they'd been whispering to each other in Econ. They should have been more careful.

"Will you just shut the hell up?" Billy finally said. "No wonder Harrington kicked you to the curb. You're a fuckin' loser. You act like you're hot shit? You're *nothing*."

With that, he stormed off to sneak a smoke. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Steve's head turn and hoped he wouldn't follow. It would attract too much attention.

That night Billy and Steve made it to their hiding spot by the quarry and it was handjobs in the Camaro. When they heard a rustling outside, they ignored it because Steve was so close...

Later, after everything broke open, Billy relived the moment of hearing that noise outside over and over, but instead of again feeling that joy at the look on Steve's face, all he felt was dread, dread, dread...

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Sometimes you gotta drive.

Notes for the Chapter:

Oh, I want to note that I do know what bisexuality is, I just think this is how these two characters would talk about their sexuality in this time period. For the record!

From the floor of his room, Billy could see all the crap under his bed; cum covered socks, Play Girl (he thought he'd thrown that out, that was stupid), empty hair spray cans.

"Stay down," his father said. "You need to learn when to stay down."

He didn't have to wonder if Max had actually ratted him out. His father solved that mystery right away.

From what Billy gathered, Tommy sat on the information of Steve and Billy in the Camaro for a whole two days before giving Billy's father a call on Friday. When he got home that night Billy was wary. Susan and Max weren't around but his father was. That was never a very good sign and immediately he knew in his gut: bad shit, get out, get in the car and go. But his father cornered him first.

"You need to learn there are consequences to your actions."

It had started with just a smack, just as it had when he was little.

"I don't know what to do with you," his father said. "You need to *learn*."

His father kept asking him questions but he was too stunned to answer and then he got hit if he didn't answer or he answered wrong. Everything was caving in. He just wanted it to be over so he goaded his father just to end the game.

“I fucked him okay,” Billy finally, voice thick. “I fucked him in the car. He fucked me too.”

His father had turned too fast at a point and Billy had been startled and jerked, tripping, falling to the floor, where his father told him to stay down.

“You disobeyed me,” his father said. “You know what happens when you disobey me.”

“Yes-”

He couldn’t really get the word out because his father was pressing his shoe to Billy’s throat.

“I break things,” his father said.

He kicked Billy in the stomach. Once. Twice. It made him remember kicking Steve in the stomach.

“I’d fuck him again,” he said, wheezing. His father kicked.

“Stop it!”

Billy thought he was imagining Max for a second, that maybe he was dying and this was some last hallucination before blinking right out. He saw her kick his dad’s leg out but he found his balance and then broke the cardinal rule of marriage to Susan, spinning around and backhanding Max in the face. It gave Billy just enough time to get to his feet, functional on adrenaline. There was nothing too strategic about it, he just summoned every ounce of strength and shoved his father so that he fell back on the hi-fi, giving him enough time to grab Max by the arm and run.

Then they were in the car and it was the squeal of his tires as he pulled out with a jerk, knocking over a trashcan before they sped out into the darkness of Hawkins. Billy drove like a maniac on his best day. Max was shouting in his ear. He didn’t even see the telephone poll but he managed to stop with a terrible jerk when Max screamed that he should. His nose was bleeding all over his shirt.

“Where are we going!” Max said.

"I don't know. I'll take you to Sinclair's-"

"No, he'll go asking for me there. Um...Will's house. The Byers' house. They're nice."

"Fine."

He thought she'd say Mike Wheeler's. The last thing he wanted was to run into Mrs. Wheeler right now.

"Then what?" Max said.

"I don't know."

Driving up to the Byers' house brought that other whole awful night rushing back. He couldn't put a thought together in his head.

His car was loud and the Byers front door popped open before he'd even stopped, Joyce and Jonathan coming out to investigate.

"Max," Billy said, before she could get out of the car. She turned back, her cheek still red where he'd hit her, her eyes fierce. "Thanks."

"You going to Steve's?" Max said. Billy only nodded and Max said, "Good."

He watched her walk up to Mrs. Byers and Jonathan and start explaining with emphatic hand gestures. He saw Mrs. Byers cover her mouth and put a protective arm around Max and lead her into the house with one worried look back at Billy. Jonathan frowned at the car and tossed Billy a nod and went inside.

The adrenaline rush started wearing off on the way to Steve's. He could barely drive. Everything hurt. At Steve's house, he didn't let himself rest in the car, knowing he wouldn't want to move again if he tried. He opened the door and fell out onto the ground and staggered to his feet. He saw a light come on in the downstairs and then the door opened and there was Steve.

I'll be fine, he thought, if I can get to Steve.

"Billy... oh shit."

"He knows," Billy said. "He *knows*."

"Oh fuck. Come inside."

"I didn't know where to go."

"No, it's fine. C'mon, baby."

Steve's parents weren't home. Billy was starting to wonder if Steve's parents actually existed.

Steve sat him down in that kitchen that seemed half as big as his whole house. He helped Billy light a cigarette and muttered something about being right back, returning with Tylenol, a beer, a box of Kleenex, and a bag of frozen peas.

"Your eye looks kinda fucked up," Steve said, wincing as he looked at it. "Your cheek, I guess."

"Everything's fucked up," Billy said sniffing. He wiped at his bloody nose and Steve pressed the peas to his cheek. "Tommy saw us at the quarry. He called my dad."

"What the *hell*?"

"I went off on Tommy the other day." Billy took the Tylenol and cracked open the beer, taking a sip. "He was being a pissy little shit." "Yeah, he's always been like that."

"My dad even hit Max," Billy said. "Susan's gonna lose her shit."

"Max was there?"

"She showed up, tried to stop him. She's fine, I took her to the Byers."

"She's a real tough kid."

"Yeah." He shook his head, the enormity of everything beginning settle. "I can't go back there."

"No." Steve shook his head. "No way. Not as long as he's there. Just

don't worry about that right now. Stay here. Does he know it was me in the car? Does he even know who I am?"

"He didn't say. Just knew I was with a guy."

"I think..." Steve scratched his head. "We should tell Hopper."

"What? Why!" Billy gaped at him, not particularly wanting to tell anyone who didn't already know. Though Tommy was probably about to put it all over school and then it wouldn't matter.

Billy couldn't stop thinking about kicking the shit out of him.

"Hopper's alright," Steve said. "Trust me on this. It would be good to have him in our corner."

Billy wanted to argue. It all felt so embarrassing. He hated the thought of people seeing him weak. Except that Hopper really already seemed to know about his dad anyway, even if he didn't know about Billy. They'd even shared a cigarette once.

"We're not going to tell him about *us*," Billy said.

"Okay." Steve nodded. He leaned against the table and stroked Billy's hair which was just about too damn tender, it was about to undo him. "Anyway, if you left Max at the Byers, I think Mrs.Byers might call him."

Billy's gaze kept flitting around the room. It had all happened less than twenty minutes ago. He still felt a kind of pounding in his ears. He kept expecting his father to suddenly appear.

They sat at the table for a bit. Steve seemed to get the idea that Billy needed to calm down. He smoked three cigarettes and drank a little beer and Steve sat with him, not asking too many questions, though he couldn't mask his worry and now the worry only made Billy feel shittier.

"You want to come up to my room?" Steve said.

"Tryin' to get lucky," Billy said weakly.

“Yeah,” Steve said, “you really look in the mood.” He stood and offered his arm and it took a while to get Billy up the stairs.

Billy had imagined Steve’s bedroom as some luxurious suite for the boy who had everything. Though not too familiar with actual luxury, he’d imagined something like silk sheets and three televisions. Maybe a waterbed. Windows that opened by remote control. One of those things in the wall so you could talk to people in other rooms. It was possible his perception of what constituted “rich” versus “well off enough” was slightly skewed. But Steve’s room was a whole lot nicer than Billy’s, that much was obvious. His bed *was* big and high off the ground and he had a fancy sheet and comforter set that looked about two feet thick. The room was eerily neat except for some clothes and cassettes scattered around. There was a nice little desk with a nice little desk lamp. The plaid wallpaper matched the curtains.

He had a Tears for Fears poster up.

Of course, Billy thought.

He sat Billy down on the bed and knelt to take off his boots.

“Jesus, Harrington. I can take off my shoes. Don’t mother me.” Even so, he couldn’t help but wince as he leaned over to unlace his boots, his entire left side aflame.

“Let me help you, dumbass.”

Billy relented and Steve helped him off with his boots and his jacket. Billy’s shirt was sweaty and though he dreaded Steve seeing whatever his body felt like it must *look* like, it was uncomfortable and he tugged at the bottom of his shirt and hissed as Steve helped him peel it off.

“Jesus *fucking* Christ!”

“It’s not that bad.” He sat hunched over, his hair in his eyes as he looked down at his torso, colored with a mottled swath of purple.

“Wait, some of these are old...” Steve pulled over a lamp from his nightstand to get a better look at Billy’s bruising. He gently traced a yellowing splotch from being thrown against the dresser. “When did

this happen?"

"I dunno. A week ago."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Steve was trying to control his voice and Billy shrugged. "Look, I know you think you deserve this shit or something but you don't alright? Man... You might have internal bleeding or something. We should take you to the hospital."

"No way."

"Billy-

"Did you go to the hospital?"

"When?" Steve only looked confused.

"When. When I fucking beat your face in, Steve," Billy said. "You know that time I could've killed you, did you go to the hospital?"

"I...no..."

"Why are you doing this?" Billy said, a causeless panic rising up. "Why are you *with* me after that shit?"

"Because...because you changed, because I like who you really are-"

"But what if I'm really like him-"

"But you're *not*." He touched Billy's cheek to comfort him and Billy turned his head away, he felt tears coming and he couldn't stop. None of it would stop.

"I'm just really sorry alright..."

"I know, you told me that-"

"No, but I'm really fucking sorry for what I did to Max and you and all of it. I don't want to..." A sob came up in his and he shut his eyes. "I don't want to *be* like him."

"I know." Steve was sitting next to him, in his space and Billy couldn't decide if he wanted him there or not, if he should even be

there. "I know but listen, you know that now, right? You know you don't want to be like him so you don't have to be. You didn't know that before right? You shouldn't have done that shit. Or treated Max like that and Lucas and... Trust me, I'm not arguing. You know that. It was bad. But you *know* now like...right?"

Billy nodded. "I'm just really sorry." He collapsed into Steve, sobbing into his shirt. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry..."

Billy cried until his eyes were sore and Steve held him for a long time and then all at once Billy felt so tired, as if the entirety of the day had abruptly caught up with him and he lay back on the bed. Steve stroked his hair and now Billy never wanted him to stop but the phone rang and with a grunt of irritation Steve reluctantly stepped away to answer it. Billy watched him pick up the phone at his desk, twisting around, leaning and keeping an eye on Billy even while he was only across the room.

"Hello? Oh...yeah. Hi. Um, yeah. He's here... Yeah, he's *really* messed up. Okay.... *Don't* tell him where- yeah good. Okay, I will...." There was a long pause and then Steve seemed to be trying to figure out what to say and he smiled softly at Billy. "Look, I can tell you he didn't do anything wrong alright? Not that, ya know... Well, that's all I'm gonna say about it okay? Alright. Thanks, Hop. Bye."

Steve hung up and kicked off his shoes. "Hopper says to stay here. If my parents disagree they're supposed to call him."

"Hmm."

Steve came around the bed and lay down, propping himself up on his arms next to Billy. "Your dad left the house. But I guess Joyce got in contact with Max's mom and called Hopper or something. Max is still at the Byers... Anyway, Max's mom's got a patrol car parked outside if he comes back. I have a feeling Hopper's just going to run him out of town. I know I wouldn't want Hopper mad at me. Sounds like she's done with him though."

"Yeah, we'll see about that. Not a big fuckin' fan of Susan."

"Yeah," Steve said with a snort. "I wouldn't be either." He traced the

cord of muscle along Billy's forearm. "I'm really shitty at knowing the right thing to say about stuff. I...really just want to go after him with a bat, ya know."

"Sounds about right." He managed a smile.

"I'm glad you came here," Steve said.

"Goddamn, Harrington..." Billy looked up and met his eyes.

"I know." Steve said. White Knight Steve and all that."

"No, just... First time I saw you I just wanted your dick, man. Thought that was it." He whispered. It was strange enough to be talking this way. But he'd been keeping up the bullshit for so long, he was too tired to hold onto it anymore. "I didn't...think I'd be like this with anybody. I mean...ever. But you, you're..."

"I'm what?" Steve said.

"You're real," Billy said. "You don't....pretend like everything's okay? Like...I didn't fuck you up? Like all this shit isn't happening. Man, I can't help but... love you because you're *real*."

Steve looked stunned and his eyes were wet. "Not just fuckin' with me?"

Billy shook his head.

Steve's mouth kept opening and closing and then he gave up and leaned down to kiss Billy, gentle but passionate. He curled up around Billy and kissed his shoulder and fidgeted with the hand laying over his chest.

"Don't get me wrong," Billy murmured. "I want your dick too."

Steve chuckled and remained there, hugging Billy, until they both fell asleep.

In the middle of the night, whispers woke Billy up. He opened his

eyes and it was still dark. Steve's bedroom door was open and Billy saw him whispering furiously to his parents who looked exactly like Billy had thought they would. His mother was a strawberry blonde, her hair a helmet that looked too put together to be worn with a pajama set and bathrobe. His father stood behind her, frowning, dressed exactly the same. He looked like every business man character Billy had ever seen in a movie.

"He's my *friend*," Steve said. "And he needs my help. And like I just said ten times, you can call Chief Hopper right now and-"

"We're not going to call the chief of police in the middle of the night," his mother said. "And I think that man pops pills."

"Why is he sleeping in your bed?" His father said.

"Because I...because...we fell asleep there."

"He doesn't look..." Steve's mother shook her head.

"Doesn't look *what*? Did you see how fucked up he is?"

"Steven, watch your language."

"Son," his father said gravely. "Are you...gay?"

"I don't..." Steve looked back at Billy who saw his panicked face before he shut his eyes, though it was dark and Steve probably couldn't see him anyhow. "I don't know, maybe. I don't *care*, I'm standing here telling you my friend's dad beat the shit out of him and that's what you're asking me? Are you serious?"

The corner of Billy's mouth turned up.

Goddammit, Steve Harrington.

"He can stay there," his mother said. "I want you to go sleep on the couch. We haven't cleared those boxes out of the guest room..."

"Pssht... Fine. Sure." Steve said. "I don't care."

"We're *talking* about this later," his father said.

Steve closed the bedroom door and Billy couldn't hear them anymore. He lay back staring at the grey nothing of Steve's ceiling.

"Son," Billy muttered to himself. "Are you gay?"

Steve's father hadn't sounded exactly delighted by the thought, but he wasn't a guy who'd take a swing either. *Must be nice*, Billy thought.

He wasn't able to fall back to sleep for a long time, everything was sore again. But it didn't matter so much. Somebody was on his side.

In morning Billy rolled to sitting up and found a pair of fairly hideous blue track pants and a Pacers t-shirt at the foot of his bed. There was also a towel as if to drop a hint that he could shower if he liked. Billy jumped on the opportunity for the sheer pleasure of a long hot shower in a bathroom much nicer than his own and found himself fascinated by all the personal *Steve* things in the bathroom. He used some girly as hell shampoo. He used Irish Spring soap. He used Barbasol shaving cream and there was a bottle of Old Spice on the sink next to a messy clump of Gillettes. Old Spice didn't seam very *Stevey* to Billy. Maybe that's why it hadn't been opened. For kicks, Billy slapped a little on, since he didn't have his own cologne. He toweled dried his hair and while it was damp looked for something to style it into half-decent. Under the sink he snorted a laugh as he took out a hidden can of hairspray.

"Oh my..."

He found the discovery so amusing that it managed to significantly lighten his mood. And anyway, it was apparently magic, although his hair felt a little on the fluffy side when he was through.

In the bedroom, Billy found that Steve had also left a pair of purple Calvins for him to wear.

"Fuck."

They were clean and everything, sure, but there's was just something about holding them in his hand in Steve's bedroom that made him

feel both turned on and touched somehow. That was nothing to putting them on, and they were a little tight on his ass. He put on the track pants and the t-shirt, at which point he felt like a complete tool. On the other hand, they were Steve's clothes, which was comforting.

Steve's parents were, mercifully, not at home.

He found Steve in his nice modern silvery kitchen and he sat at the bar counter and tapped his fingers. Steve was fiddling with the cap of a jug of orange juice and then he spun around and smiled sweetly when he saw Billy.

"Hey," Steve said. "Morning."

"Hey."

"What do you like for breakfast? I got eggs, I got..." He opened the fridge. "Leftover pizza... I got cereal."

"Cereal's good," Billy said. He felt he'd lost his footing in the fresh light of early morning. The Harrington's house was too big, too nice, too...Harrington. Any other day he'd be talking trash about rich assholes but he was broken open and the sight of Steve in a thin t-shirt, Billy's necklace out and bouncing around on his chest. Steve poured Trix into a bowl, cheerfully humming "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go"

Son...are you gay.

He abruptly remembered that he had told Steve he loved him.

"Shit," Billy said under his breath.

"S'matter?" Steve said.

"Nothing."

Steve set a bowl of Trix and a spoon on the counter in front of Billy and smiled. "Sorry. Didn't ask if you wanted Trix. I don't know why I thought you would."

"I would," he said. Before he could grab the spoon, Steve leaned over and kissed him softly. "You look good." He pushed a lock of hair

behind Billy's ear. It was a lot easier when they were groping in the car. This felt like being stripped of skin. "Not your usual devastating self but you're not very swollen or anything." He stroked Billy's cheek.

Sometimes the small part Billy that could cop to believing he was a piece of shit wanted to ask Steve why he would be with someone like him. It was right on the edge of his tongue. But instead he dropped his eyes and ate cereal that tasted a little cardboardy in his mouth.

"Do you drink coffee?" His eyes roved over Billy but he didn't betray that he thought anything was amiss. He turned and picked up a can of Yuban from the kitchen counter. "Wait, yeah you do. You drink it black, right? I remember from the diner."

"Coffee would be great," Billy said. "Steve..."

Steve turned around. His hair wasn't styled yet. Billy had never touched Steve's hair when it wasn't sprayed to hell. He wanted to run his fingers through it and feel how baby soft it was.

"Yeah."

"I don't know...what I would've done if you weren't...if..."

Steve turned a little pink and Billy wanted to kiss him again. "Hey, ya know. Sometimes you need a White Knight around."

"Right." He went back to his cereal and watched Steve make coffee.

Steve did the goofiest shit. He tossed the coffee can between his hands, flipped a spoon in the air.

Billy's heart ached.

"I need to drive somewhere," Billy said, all impulse.

"Huh?" Steve caught his spoon and frowned. "Drive somewhere? Where?"

"Anywhere," Billy said, shaking his head. "Just...to drive. Just to get out."

Steve took a deep breath and Billy braced himself for a disagreement. He felt on edge. Driving had always been something of a release, somewhere just beneath sex and fighting.

“No problem,” Steve said.

“Really...”

“Fuck. Why not. Think I just became the gay son, might be disinherited or something. Let’s fuck off.”

“Yeah.” The thought cheered Billy. Just the idea of being on an open road to anywhere was relaxing. “Hey, do you have the Byers’ number?”

Billy checked in on Max who, by all accounts was happy as a clam hanging out with Will and Jonathan. There was no news as to his dad’s whereabouts and he wondered what the hell that meant. Was he looking for Billy? Had he just up and skipped town? Would he spend the rest of his life waiting for his dad to find him and kick his ass again?

Steve made them coffee and found a thermos buried in a cupboard for them to take it on the road. Billy kept on Steve's Pacer's shirt but changed back into his jeans. Much as he liked a tight pair of jeans, he wasn’t even going to attempt to fit into Steve’s. He was pretty sore, and he took some more Tylenol and then Steve shrugged and stuck the bottle in his pocket.

“Which car?” Steve said.

“Mine,” Billy said. For one thing, his music was in it. That was a deal-breaker.

Until it wasn’t.

“You gotta be kiddin’ me,” Billy said with a groan.

They were ten minutes outside of Hawkins, Billy already feeling a little more loosened up, when Steve whipped out the cassettes he’d apparently stuck into his jacket. They had been listening to Van Halen and Billy had no intention of not continuing to listen to Van

Halen.

He had been overruled. He was beginning to find that his “my way or the highway” attitude with people was more often caving to Steve’s way just because he *liked* Steve.

Or rather he loved Steve. Which he had told Steve. Ugh.

“I’m so sick of these assholes,” Billy muttered.

“C’moooon.”

The Police. The goddamn Police.

Billy was driving because that was the whole point. He had to move his seat back a little to get comfortable but now he felt pretty good with his pedal to the metal, occasionally sipping Steve’s coffee and smoking and watching his boyfriend bop around in his seat to The goddamn Police.

“You are the only one who gets to play this bullshit in the car,” Billy said.

“See,” Steve said, “saying that is another example of something that’s nicer than a bathroom dick.”

Billy laughed and looked at him and absently drummed his fingers to the music despite himself.

“Can’t believe you told your parents that,” he muttered, turning his head back to the road.

“Told em’ what?”

“Eh, I heard you guys talking for a minute in the middle of the night when your dad asked you if you’re gay. You didn’t even deny it or anything.”

“Oh.” He snorted a sad little laugh. “I don’t know. I mean are you gay if you like girls okay too?”

Billy only shrugged at that. “Not the point,” he said.

“Yeah well, if they’re shocked maybe they need to be shocked, they could stand it.” He crossed his arms, staring out the window. “I can’t really complain about anything. I don’t want to sound like an asshole given your whole situation. They’re fine. Just... last year or so all this shit went down and they suddenly seemed like these brainless robots. Like they don’t have feelings or they...don’t...*care*. I dunno. I dunno what I’m saying, I’m probably just the same.”

“No, you’re not. You’re not like that. S’like I said, you’re...”

“Real?” Steve smiled and ducked his head.

“Yeah.”

They drove past cornfields and big empty flat spaces that made Billy miss the valleys and mountains of California a little bit. Billy found himself asking Steve all kinds of questions that popped into his head. Had they always lived in Hawkins? Had he done stuff like Little League as a kid? Why was Tommy such a pissant? If he hadn’t fought a bear, what had it been? And what had really happened that night at the Byers house anyway?

Steve was vague about some of it but promised he’d explain more someday. Billy couldn’t bring himself to care.

It felt really alien to trust somebody so much.

They stopped at a diner and ordered milkshakes and fries and Steve told Billy about his first blowjob and Billy laughed so hard he snorted ice cream through his nose. Steve didn’t let him forget it. Then they started talking Pacers and Lakers and defense and offense and Billy became so passionate about the subjects that his fist hit a spoon that flipped into the air and landed behind the counter. A waitress gave Billy a dirty look.

“Hey, sorry about that, sweetheart!” He winked and she melted a little.

Steve eyed him warily. “Ya know, you might even be more dangerous as a not asshole than you were as an asshole?”

Billy sat forward and turned it “on”, fixing Steve with his most

devastating expression, knowing exactly the way his eyes were probably glittering, his long lashes fluttering. "Now what do you mean by that, handsome?"

"Jesus," Steve muttered.

"Not quite."

Steve chewed his lip and took his wallet out. "C'mon, let's pay up and get outta here."

"Uh, okay."

Steve seemed in a rush and nearly before he'd finished paying he was grabbing Billy by the hand and dragging him back to the car.

"Can you find someplace to park?"

"Probably."

"How do you feel? Are you sore?"

"Not too sore for this."

They'd been driving all day, the time had flown. Now it was dark and Billy was attempting to concentrate on the road, made a little more difficult by Steve as he made love to Billy's neck with his tongue, his arm wrapping around his waist.

"Goddamn, Harrington," Billy mumbled. Billy gave up and pulled over on a deserted looking street, turning his full attention to Steve. They kissed for a long time and that turned to struggling to tear off his each other's clothes and steaming up the windows and grunts and gasps until Billy ended up sprawled shirtless in the back seat, his fly hanging open, Steve breathless on top of him and mouthing at his chest with his swollen lips. Billy pulled a pack of cigs from his back-pocket and Steve reached behind him to bring down the window.

"You drive me crazy," Steve murmured and kissed a nipple. "Fucking crazy." He traced the bruises along Billy's side and laid soft kisses there.

Billy smiled at that and took a drag and raked his fingers through the

chaos of Steve's sweaty hair. "Thanks, babe."

"What if we..." Steve lifted his head, biting his lip. "It's getting late and we've been driving all day. What if we got a motel tonight?"

Billy exhaled and raised his eyebrows. "Wow. Not too eager to see your parents huh?"

"Not too eager for either of us to see our parents. I got enough cash for somewhere cheap. Order up some Dominos..."

"Hell yeah." Billy kissed him. "Let's do it."

They barely knew where they were, having driven with no direction, but after passing the millionth gas station and the hundredth road stop they found a motel outfitted with ratty old 50's bungalows dimly lit in the dark. Steve jogged over to the office to get them a room and Billy leaned on the car. It was deathly quiet but for the occasional car speeding down the highway and a tall streetlight cast the parking lot and the empty fields behind it in an eerie glow. It felt like a kind of limbo as he smoked there; some place between their past and future.

It did occur to him that the privacy of a motel room implied that Steve wanted to kick things up a notch too. He glanced at the office and saw Steve still talking to the woman behind the counter. Billy walked around to the trunk and unlocked it and pulled up a corner of the upholstery where, sure enough, there was a paper bag containing some condoms and lube. It had been a total whim. No one was likely to ever find it, but if he was in a position to need the bag, he'd hate to get stuck.

He'd never *actually* done that with anybody. He'd jerked off thinking about doing it with Steve specifically a million times. In Cali, he'd wanted to. He'd once managed to sniff out a scruffy gay bar and sneak in (having shown off enough skin) with the intention of doing it with just about anybody half-decent looking. But every guy there was doing shots and telling horror stories about "gay plague" and at sixteen it had spooked the hell out of him so much he'd left without

even touching anyone. Hence, the rubbers.

“Maybe I should call home though,” Steve said, when he came back. “I just won’t tell them where I am.” Billy only shrugged and Steve shifted on his feet, hemming and hawing.

Billy watched him go to the payphone and stand there with his hand on the receiver, tapping his finger. He picked it up and his fingers hovered over the dial pad. He zoned out for about a full minute before hanging it up, picking it up again, and then hanging up. He walked back to Billy, hands shoved in his pockets.

“Fuck it,” Steve said.

“Now you’re talking,” Billy said, and stuck out his tongue.

In the motel they ordered Dominos pizza and watched a rerun of *Saturday Night Live* and Billy wished they had some beer, but at one o’clock in the morning the pizza box was long empty and there was nothing on TV and it was just the two of them alone on a bed.

“Billy,” Steve said quietly.

Billy looked at him and couldn’t think of a single thing to say and then Steve was taking off his shirt and tugging him forward by his collar. They kicked off their shoes and Steve kept trying to simultaneously make out while undressing Billy and nearly fell off the bed.

“Can we um, you know, I-I dunno if you-”

“Steve, are you trying to say you want to bone?” Billy grinned.

“Shut up.” Steve rolled his eyes. “Have you with a guy?”

Billy wanted to lie about it, he really did. Instead he said, “No.”

“Oh.”

“But I have this shit...” He grabbed the bag from the nightstand and

emptied it on the bed.

Steve lit up. "Okay," he said, nodding. "Which...way...ya know..."

"Iwantyoutodome," Billy said in a rush.

Now Steve grinned, much to cockily in Billy's opinion. Steve tapped his ear. "What was that? Say again?"

"I want you to *bone* me, Harrington." He wrapped an arm around Steve's back and pulled him close. "And don't look so smug. You started this."

"Yeah, yeah..."

"Just...just don't, ya know, plow me, alright?"

"Oh, I'll be real gentle, baby," Steve whispered, smirking.

"*Dick.*"

It was awkward at first.

"You have to like..."

"Wait, take this off..."

"Hey, ow-"

"Sorry, sorry."

"Wait, just put...*one* finger..."

"Yeah-"

"Lube!"

"Oh yeah..."

Okay...”

“Yeah...”

“...”

“...Yeah, try one more okay...”

“...”

“Kay just...*ah*, that feels...”

“Okay...”

“Ah...”

“Ah...ah... Uh, p-put it on, did you get it on?”

“Y-yeah...”

“Lube!”

“Sorry! Okay...”

“Good...”

“Uh huh...”

“Okay...but slow...”

“Right-”

“*Fuck*, w-wait stop-”

“Sorry!”

“S’okay just...wait...yeah like that...”

“Oh Jesus...”

“...”

“Okay...okay push in just a...*ah*...”

“Oh God...”

“Steve, holy...oh...”

“Like that...?”

“Yes...”

“Unh!”

“Steve-”

“Oh Jesus H....oh God, baby...”

“Please...”

Billy’s legs were wrapped around Steve’s back and Billy trembled, feeling full and surrounded and full of Steve, who was gazing down at him, eyes full of wonder.

“I got you,” Steve whispered.

In the afterglow, Steve scooted up and leaned on his hand as they shared a cigarette.

“You’re smiling,” Steve said, taking a drag.

“I smile, Harrington.”

“Not like that.”

“Fuck off.”

“Huh uh.” Steve handed him the cigarette and kissed Billy’s cheek.

“No way, man.”

Steve was just gazing at him, chewing his lip. Billy stuck his tongue between his teeth, squinting. “Seriously. *What?*”

"I like callin' you baby," Steve said.

Billy's cheeks went hot and he looked away and smoked. "Never in front of anybody."

"Did you...like it?"

"It didn't suck."

"Baby," Steve murmured and pressed soft kisses to Billy's shoulders.

"Baby...baby..."

In the morning, they were in no rush to get anywhere. They lazed around and made love again and watched TV. They walked to the convenience store half a mile down the road and stocked up on shitty junk food. They showered and put on their gross clothes, wandering into the fields behind the motel and then Steve started asking Billy questions. His mother was dead, right? What had she been like? What had he been like as a kid? When did he realize he only liked boys? How had he gotten so good at basketball?

They came along a river, more industrial seeming than scenic, it looked out at the back of a couple factories and there was some garbage in the water but the air was cool and the grass was soft and Steve plopped down and Billy sat next to him.

"We can drive back in the morning," Billy said. "We can start early if you want."

"We'll miss a couple classes," Steve pointed out. "I don't care."

"Aren't your parents going to shit a brick or something?"

"Oh yeah," Steve agreed. "And then..."

"And then... I don't fuckin' know."

"The rest of our lives, I guess."

"I found your Farrah Fawcett spray," Billy said.

"Oh shit."

Billy burst out laughing and Steve groaned and Billy pushed him down into the grass and kissed him and rested his head on his chest. He didn't stop laughing for a long time as Steve tugged gently at his long hair, getting his revenge, and it echoed in the empty field.

Hawkins

"I'm doing the best I can, Mrs. Harrington." Hopper rubbed his face with one hand and pointed to Powell's coffee mug as he walked by.

"What's that mean?" Powell said.

"It means I want coffee, genius," Hopper said, pulling the phone away. "Mrs. Harrington...Yeah, I think they're probably together too."

Mrs. Harrington was upset as Steve Harrington had not been seen in about two days.

She had mentioned some concern about gay satanic cults.

"The nature of their relationship?" Hopper said. "I couldn't say. I think they had some... Okay, well...that's not exactly my purview. No, I...I doubt this is anything similar to Will Byers given the circumstances... Well, as I said Neil Hargrove has left town. As sure as I can be. Probably because I told him if he stayed in town I'd be so far up his ass he'd feel it in his throat. Well...it seemed pretty reasonable at the time... Yes, I'll let you know, of course. Thank you. I'll speak to you soon."

Hopper hung up and sighed heavily.

He'd left out the part where he'd punched Neil Hargrove in the face for the way he'd talked about his son.

Callahan piped up from his desk. "Nature of whose relationship?"

"Steve Harrington and Billy Hargrove."

"What's that mean?"

"It means Harrington's mother thinks they're gay," Hopper said, putting on his jacket.

"You're kidding! Huh. My cousin is gay."

"Everybody's cousin is gay," Hopper said, and grabbed his hat and the styrofoam cup of coffee that Powell handed him. He'd drained it by the time he got out the door.

It wasn't just any missing teenager, it was Steve Harrington. Hopper had never gotten to know him well, but the kid had put his life between death and the kids too many times for Hopper to feel anything but affection. Then there was Billy Hargrove. Hargrove had struck Hopper as unavoidably tragic and definitely trouble, somebody he'd probably end up arresting a lot once he hit eighteen if not earlier. He'd guessed about the kid's dad beating him up, but he sure hadn't guessed the other part, the part where it was starting to seem like not just wild gossip that Billy Hargrove and Steve Harrington had fallen in love and run away together.

"Why can't this town cut me a break," Hopper muttered, as the Blazer squealed out of its parking space.

Hopper had every intention of finding the missing teenagers sooner rather than later. He wasn't even particularly worried about it. It wasn't something he would normally try, but for a select group of young people that Steve definitely fell into, it wasn't a question.

At the Byers, everyone was already waiting for him. Joyce handed Hopper a fresh cup and he nodded hello to everyone, the kids

crowded into the living room, Nancy and Jonathan hovering in the kitchen.

“Alright, let’s give it a shot,” Hopper said.

The kids were all gathered around, not seeming to know whether Max was happy or sad that her step-brother had disappeared.

“I’m not worried,” Dustin said, adjusting his ball cap. “Steve’ll be fine.”

“With *Billy*?” Mike said.

“I told you,” Max said. “They’re friends now.”

“Bullshit,” Dustin said.

Eleven sat on top of Joyce’s coffee table. “The picture?” she said.

Max nodded and handed her a year-old picture of Billy and she studied it.

Hopper said, “El, you know I wouldn’t ask this for just anyone, but-”

“It’s *Steve*,” Dustin said, betraying his concern.

“And my brother,” Max said, her voice tight. Everyone looked at her, surprised, and she crossed her arms. “Just find em’.”

Eleven gave Max a reassuring smile and studied the picture for another few seconds before putting on her blindfold.

In the void Eleven found them.

There was a big bed in the middle of the empty darkness. It was messy, the covers shoved aside. Steve Harrington sat up against the headboard, one bare leg folded up. Next to him lay the other boy, the one everyone said had hurt Steve before. He was resting his head against Steve’s chest and Steve was stroking his hair. They wore

wearing dirty t-shirts and their underwear. There was a TV on in front of the bed, but they weren't really watching it as Steve hummed and looked down at the other boy who stared off, his face soft and serious. Billy held Steve's other hand in his. They didn't look like they had any intention of moving.

Eleven held on and watched them for another minute, just because there was something so sweet about the two of them.

She watched Steve kiss the top of Billy's head and say, "Billy... I love you too."

Eleven smiled and then she came back from the void.

Everyone was looking at Eleven.

"Well?" Hopper said.

"They're fine."

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

"You know where they are?" Hopper said.

"Yes," Eleven said.

"Okay," Hopper said. "Great. Where are they?"

Eleven smiled and said, "No."

Everybody exchanged wary looks. "What's that mean?" Hopper said. "You know but you're not saying...?"

"Yes."

"Eleven," Joyce said, stepping forward. "Steve's parents are *very* worried."

"Steve is safe," Eleven said.

“Billy’s with him right?” Max said.

“Yes.”

“El,” Hopper said, in his best “no Eggos before vegetables” voice. “You need to tell us where they are.”

“No.”

“El!”

“They’re together,” El said. “They are safe together. They...need to be alone. They’re like... like...”

Max said, “Eleven-”

“Like me and Mike. *Love.*”

“Oh man.”

Everyone gaped at Eleven.

Nancy said, “*What?*”

Dustin said, “Wait...”

Lucas said, “No way.”

Mike said, “No *way!*”

Will said, “Oh!”

Jonathan said, “That makes sense.” Nancy smacked his arm and he said, “I’m being serious.”

Eleven just looked confused. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” Joyce said firmly. “*Nothing* is the matter.”

“Uh *yeah*, something is the matter,” Dustin said. “Billy kicked his ass once.”

“So did I,” Jonathan muttered, and Nancy swatted him again.

"He's different," Max said, her mouth tight. "Believe me. I would know."

"Everybody shut the hell up," Hopper said tiredly. "I don't care if they're boyfriends or what the hell. We know they're safe. Fine. But I have to tell Susan Hargrove and the Harringtons something."

"Just tell them Steve called me," Nancy said with a shrug. "Said he was safe with Billy, but didn't say where. They'll come home when they come home."

"Fine." He pointed at El. "This can't go on too long. They stay missing much longer..."

"Okay," El said.

Nancy and Joyce huddled together and went to make calls to Mrs. Harrington and Billy's step-mother. The boys were still trying to wrap their minds around this revelation and Max somehow found herself coming to Billy's defense.

Hopper tapped Eleven's shoulder. "You're not making my life any easier, ya know."

She looked up at him and tipped her head, deep in thought. "But it's good. Steve and Billy?"

"Um." Hopper scratched his head. "I guess."

"Everybody should have a Mike," El said, with a stare that left no room for debate.

Hopper ruffled her hair and shook his head fondly. "That is a nice way to look at it, kid."